



Sleeping Through the Night

Some parents are lucky, and their baby sleeps all night, starting at an early age. However, most babies need some help to learn how to sleep through the night. It's easier to help your baby develop good sleeping habits during the first six months than to correct bad sleeping habits later on.

The first rule for any age is that you should make sure your baby or child falls asleep where you want her to sleep. If she falls asleep in your arms, then when she wakes up, she'll want you to help her fall asleep again. Here are some of our recommendations at each age:

Newborns

Put in crib drowsy but awake, rather than asleep. By allowing your infant to develop self-soothing skills, from the drowsy state to the sleep state, you are empowering him to be able to fall back to sleep after normal nighttime awakenings.

Hold and comfort your infant for all fussy crying during the first 3 months. You cannot spoil your newborn, and it is important for your newborn to develop this trust in you. Even if your baby is "colicky", there will be some times during the day when he won't be crying – this is the ideal time to place him down in the crib to go to sleep.

Help your baby get his days and nights straight. After being in the womb for 9 months, in the dark, babies are often born with their days and nights reversed – waking up frequently at night and starting to sleep longer stretches during the day. You can help your baby get over this problem:

- *Keep his room dark at night and light during the day.* It is the light and dark cycles which eventually help get your baby's hormones in sync to make him sleepier at night.
- *Limit daytime naps* to two consecutive hours at a time, and try to feed him every 2 ½ to 3 hours during your normal waking hours (daytime and evening); this will encourage him to have longer stretches of sleep during the night rather than during the daytime.
- *Make middle-of-the-night feedings boring.* Avoid turning on the lights, talking to your baby or rocking him, as lots of stimulation may awaken him more and delay his transition back to sleep.

Have a consistent place for sleep. Place your newborn to sleep in the bed that you would like him to continue to sleep for the next several months. Infants can get accustomed to falling asleep in a particular bed. If you change the place where he sleeps, you may disrupt his sleep pattern and he may have difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep in the future.

2-4 Month-Old Babies

Try to delay middle-of-the-night feedings. Not every whimper in the middle of the night means that your baby is hungry. At this stage, infants are usually eating more during the day, and may not need to eat as frequently at night. As they get bigger, they are able to store more energy overnight, allowing them to go much longer between feedings. When you hear your baby begin to stir, see if he can get back to sleep on his own before getting up to feed him. If he doesn't fall back asleep on his own, then get up to feed him.

Your baby will find sleep routines soothing at this age. Be sure to watch for the "tired" signs – a yawn, or rubbing of the eyes. These are the signals that it is time for sleep. If your baby gets overtired, he will be running on overdrive (adrenaline), sometimes making it harder to fall asleep.



4-6 Month-Old Babies

Try to discontinue middle-of-the-night feedings. By six months old, many infants will be able to sleep for an eight-hour stretch at night. Allow your infant to try to self-soothe first before feeding her. If you do feed her, make the encounter brief and boring. Feeding one last time right before your own bedtime can sometimes encourage a long stretch of sleep that is synchronized with your own!

When you decide to “close the night kitchen”, your child will not like it! After all, you are changing the rules. You need to decide that this is what you want to do, and then stick to it. If you can't stand to hear her cry, and you give in and feed her, she will learn that “if I just cry long enough, my mommy or daddy will show up to feed me”. You and your partner may need to support each other here, and come up with a sleep plan that you agree to do, even when the crying is breaking your heart.

6-9 Month-Old Babies

Confront separation anxiety. When your baby cries at bedtime, or wakes up after being put to bed, reassure her that you are available by talking with her, and letting her see you briefly. But keep the encounter brief and boring, and avoid picking her up, feeding her or rocking her. It's OK to change her diaper if necessary, but then put her right back in the crib. At this age your baby should learn to self-soothe, and should be able to do so once she is assured that you are nearby.

If your infant is hysterical when you leave, it is OK to stay in her room until she falls asleep – but remember not to feed her or rock her. It is also OK to leave the room, with calm, reassuring comments, and then check back every 10 or 15 minutes if she hasn't stopped crying. But each time, act the same way: gently reassure her, tell her she has to go to sleep, and then leave again. Babies love and are reassured by routines so it is important to do the same thing each time. The important thing is not “hypnotize” her back to sleep, such as by feeding or rocking her, so that she can learn to do it herself.

1-Year-Old Children and Older

Stick with your bedtime routine. Toddlers respond well to structure and a predictable schedule, even though they often like to test limits. It's best to stick with one bedtime ritual. For example: give the last feeding before bed, then brush her teeth, then sit in the same chair and read a bedtime book – then, say “goodnight” and put her into the crib while she's still awake.

Make sure she stays in her bed through the night. Some children will suffer from nightmares and bedtime fears that may make them want to join their parents in bed. Never ignore your child's nightmares – discuss her fears and concerns with her, and if this is a frequent problem, try to determine if there might be a reason for nightmares, such as scary TV shows. However, it is always best to make sure that she returns to her own bed for sleep. Sometimes, with an older and verbal child, it can be helpful to discuss this during the day. You can see if you can make a “sleep plan” with her, and then give her positive feedback for the behavior you want to see.

Recommended Books

- [Sleeping Through the Night](#), by Jodi Mindell
- [Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems](#), by Richard Ferber. Our experience with both of these sleep books has been excellent!
- [Good Night Sleep Tight: The Sleep Lady's Gentle Guide to Helping Your Child Go to Sleep, Stay Asleep, and Wake Up Happy](#), by Kim West and Joanne Kenen. This book is a gentler transition for parents who aren't able to carry out the Ferber or Mindell methods.